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# Westmoreland Denies CBS Report on 'Ceiling'

By M.A. FARBER **J**

Gen. William C. Westmoreland repeatedly asserted at his libel trial against CBS yesterday that he had never imposed a ceiling on estimates of enemy strength in South Vietnam nor had he ordered those figures to be suppressed or altered.

The 70-year-old retired general — whose \$120 million suit was prompted by a 1982 CBS Reports documentary titled "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception" — testified that his concern in 1967 with how the press would interpret enemy troop estimates stemmed, not from an attempt to mislead, but from an effort to have the figures understood.

"Sure we were sensitive to press reaction, and it was logical that we be," he told the jury in Federal Court in Manhattan in a long, impassioned answer to a question concerning a cable that was sent on Aug. 20, 1967, to Gen. Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The cable expressed a fear that the press would draw "erroneous and gloomy conclusions" if "inflated figures" showing a 120,000 to 130,000 "increase" in enemy size were released. It was written by General Westmoreland's deputy, Gen. Creighton B. Abrams, and endorsed by General Westmoreland, who was commander of American forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968.

The increase was mainly the result of a previous underestimate of the size of the Vietcong's self-defense forces — "people who," General Westmoreland said yesterday, "were not fighters."

The general said that, had the higher numbers for the self-defense forces been included in the military listing of enemy strength known as the order of battle, "distorting the quantity of people we were trying to kill, that were dangerous to us," it "would have been terribly detrimental to the morale of my troops."

## 'First War Without Censorship'

"This was the first war without censorship," he continued, saying American forces were making "real progress under difficult circumstances" in 1967. "My troops did a wonderful job. A commander could have had, or expected, no more."

The CBS documentary said that some intelligence officers under General Westmoreland told the network that the general had insisted on an "arbitrary" 300,000 limit on estimates of enemy forces in 1967, and that they "felt very uncomfortable carrying" out the order.

But, yesterday, General Westmoreland went beyond denying that he had given such an order, to say that none of his intelligence officers had expressed such feelings to him.

Suddenly, he plucked from the inside pocket of his suit jacket a small card

bearing the orange and yellow seal of his command in Vietnam, a card that he said was given on his instructions to every officer in Vietnam, from headquarters down to platoon.

"I would like to read this to the jury," the general said, as his lawyer, Dan M. Burt, quickly moved for its introduction as evidence. "There are 15 points on it, but let me just read three."

"The first says, 'Make the welfare of your men your prime concern, with special attention on mail, mess and medical care.' The second says, 'Give priority emphasis to matters of intelligence, counterintelligence and accurate reporting.' And the 13th says, 'Maintain an open-door policy on complaints and a sensitivity to the detection and correction of malpractices.'"

Only last weekend, General Westmoreland said, he was in Washington to attend the dedication of the Vietnam War veterans' memorial, and three former servicemen approached him to say that "they had written me complaints" in Vietnam and had "received attention."

## C.I.A. Meeting

On the CBS broadcast, a former intelligence colonel, Gains Hawkins, said he believed that the enemy strength figures advanced by General Westmoreland's command "were lower than they should be" and that he had said so to Central Intelligence Agency analysts at a meeting at C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va., in late August 1967.

Yesterday, Mr. Burt asked General Westmoreland whether Colonel Hawkins had ever complained to him.

A. He never did.

Q. About anything?

A. Not that I recall.

Q. Did anyone ever tell you that Gains Hawkins had complained to them?

A. No.

Q. Did any intelligence officer complain that they had been ordered to reduce, or alter, or suppress, intelligence figures?

A. No.

The C.I.A. meeting attended by Colonel Hawkins as a representative of General Westmoreland's command was one in a series in mid-1967 that focused on the preparation of a revised order of battle and of a related intelligence estimate of enemy strength for President Johnson.

Before those meetings, which were also attended by delegates from other intelligence agencies, Colonel Hawkins had concluded, on the basis of new studies, that the size of the Vietcong's self-defense units was in the neighborhood of 120,000, not the 70,000 then included in the order of battle. That view was shared by Maj. Gen. Joseph A. McChristian, who was General West-

moreland's chief of intelligence until June 1, 1967.

In late May 1967, General McChristian wrote a report on the subject and General Westmoreland was briefed on it. But, according to the CBS documentary, the report was "suppressed" by the commander.

Yesterday, as on Wednesday, General Westmoreland testified that he provided the higher figures to his military and civilian superiors — Adm. Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, commander in chief of Pacific forces, and Ellsworth Bunker, the American Ambassador in South Vietnam.

And yesterday, Mr. Burt introduced several June 1967 cables between General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp, who was based in Honolulu, that discussed revised estimates for the self-defense forces and the need for "exploration and analysis" of the figures that would avoid "embarrassment" when they were published.

Mr. Burt asked General Westmoreland what he meant by the word "embarrassment" in a cable he sent to Admiral Sharp on June 29.

The witness explained that the cable had been drafted by General McChristian's successor, Maj. Gen. Phillip B. Davidson Jr., although he had reviewed and approved it. General Davidson, he said, "was very sensitive" to the need for "having all his ducks in a row so he could defend his estimate" to other intelligence agencies when the time came.

But General Westmoreland said that, by August 1967, he had decided that an exact figure for the "home guard" self-defense forces should be eliminated from the order of battle in favor of a verbal description of the units and what they contributed to enemy capabilities.

## 'Purify' Battle Count

"I wanted to purify the so-called order of battle," he testified, "so that it would be an order of battle in fact. I felt it was important that we sort out the enemy organization so that there would be no ambiguity in who we were fighting, with cognizance of the fact that there were other elements in South Vietnam associated with the Communist cause."

General Westmoreland said the figures settled upon for other categories of enemy strength, such as regular North Vietnamese troops or Vietcong guerrillas, were proposed to him by General Davidson, days before they were taken to the C.I.A. meeting by Colonel Hawkins and others. The figures totaled about 250,000, excluding a separate category of 80,000 to 90,000 political cadre.

"They were General Davidson's best estimates, and I accepted them as that," said General Westmoreland, who denied telling General Davidson or any other intelligence officer that he had to stay below a "ceiling" of 300,000.